

Interview with Margaret Clark

Margaret Clark: I think we might as well start at Paragon House, which was built in 1798 and is on the corner of South Row and Pond Road. It is the family of the Lewisham and Greenwich boroughs; it is the dividing line between Greenwich and Lewisham. It's worth knowing that. When we came to live at Paragon house my father was sent rates claims or whatever you call them both by Lewisham and Greenwich, they thought they would both have a go and of course naturally we made enquiries and found that actually the centre goes down Pond road. Now Pond Road is so called because it slopes down and at the bottom was a pond belonging to, I think belong to the Wricklemarsh Estate, who owned this pond presumably the lord of the manor of the Wricklemarsh Estate so we still have Manor Way leading to Lee Road, which is quite near the bottom of Lee Road. I seem to remember where I haven't been there for ages, that there is a gate or a gateway, the gate has probably collapsed years ago and you go through this and you find yourself in, or very near Lee Green. Lee Green of course obviously must have had a green at sometime but that was before my time, I've never seen it.

I thought you might be a little interested to know about the Heath, it was of course the place where golf in England was first played. The Scottish King, I've forgotten his name, introduced golf to England and the first golf links must have been on the Heath, it had to be conveniently near the place where he was domiciled. As well as playing golf on the Heath there were other activities, there was a trotting course, this was a sandy track that put round a fairly large area of the Heath and people used to go riding on that and I suppose they hired their horses in most cases. My dad used to go riding and we didn't have a horse so he must have hired his, possibly from viewing stables, well I don't know, at that's as far as I've got.

Interviewer: Where about were the stables? Viewing Stables, you said?

MC: Down what is now called Williams Road, no not Williams Road, higher up the hill.

Do you remember the stables?

MC: Not very well.

Do you think that's where your Dad got the horse?

MC: Probably, yes, as we didn't keep a horse.

Were you born in Blackheath?

MC: Yes, I was born at Paragon House.

Tell me a little bit about the house; your family and how many there were of you

MC: I don't want to go into too many personal details. My family interests are just not for other people really.

What school did you go to?

MC: What school did I go to? Blackheath High School

What were your memories of that? Was it a good school? Did you enjoy it?

MC: Yes I think I can say did enjoy it there. I have fairly amusing memories of it, but I don't want to mention people's names. Before I started writing my memoirs I promised myself I wouldn't say anything unkind or in slightest bit libelous about people, but of course in my memories, I don't know, anyway carry on. Ask me something now.

So you went to Blackheath School and you enjoyed it there, did you come home at lunchtime?

MC: I think I came home for lunch, I can't remember for certain but I think I did.

And did you ever go down into the village at Blackheath; did you ever go to the shops? Tell me about that, what you can remember?

MC: Yes, well there was the first shop you came to as you came down from the heath into the village, down Montpelier Vale was a newsagent and next to that was a fish shop and next to that was a chemist, Mr Grimwade. I liked Mr Grimwade very much partly because on one occasion I really did have a nastily tickling cough, and he was very kind and said 'Oh, we must do something about that cough' and he produced a sweet, cough lozenge probably, which tasted very nice, you see. So after that the next time I went into the shop, by sheer coincidence of course, I had a very bad cough at this time he didn't take on. He was a very nice man, I liked Mr Grimwade. He went to Budleigh Salterton, and next to that was I think the Express Dairy, was the next thing you came to, oh there was an oil shop first, yes an oil shop, they sold paraffin and that sort of thing but when you came to the Express Dairy, it was a comparatively large place and you get a glass of milk, and that reminds me in the Express Dairy owned, or probably more than a field in Kidbrooke and we used to go over the fields in Kidbrooke and I was taken out in my pushchair, sorry that's off the point I know.

No that's a lovely story. So it was owned by the dairy, was it the field but the public could go through?

MC: Yes

Did you play there when you were an older child or only when you were in a pushchair?

MC: I think only in a pushchair, we had a large garden in Paragon House; I didn't need to go out to play much, I had plenty of space in the garden.

So in the dairy did you say they gave you a free glass of milk?

MC: Rarely, I forget you might have had to pay something; I'm really not sure.

That was nice anyway. Did they have a horse and cart in those days?

MC: Oh yes, we used to have what we called a water cart, have you every heard of that? In hot, very hot weather the water cart was brought out and I suppose it was owned by the council, it must have been owned, I don't know. At the back it had a spray and it used to drive quite slowly along and there was spray coming out at the back and little kids will stand underneath the spray, giggle and get thoroughly wet and it made them nice and cool. Needless to say I didn't do that.

Was it to clean the roads?

MC: To clean the road, yes, yes and to cool it too. Cool the surface.

Do you remember, somebody once at one end of you, told me once that they remember outside the railway station, the horse and cart taxis, do you remember that?

MC: The cabs! Don't call them the taxis for goodness sake. Cabs, yes well I have been in many a cab.

Would you get a cab up from the station then?

MC: Yes, we would a cab up from the station to where we live, yes.

And your father, did he work in town, or did he go in and of the city?

MC: Yes he went to the city everyday and came back in the evenings.

What was his profession?

MC: He was a Stockbroker, a member of the Stock Exchange, one of the leading firms of the Stock Exchange actually.

So he would go up and down from Blackheath station?

MC: Yes

And did you ever meet him there when he came home, as a child?

MC: No, I don't think so, no.

But you still went on the cabs?

MC: oh yes, the cabs went on for quite a long time, comparatively recently, yes but I didn't actually know that they finished, but I suppose they have.

I think awhile. I think someone actually told me they stopped just before the war and during the war they came them back because there wasn't any petrol, so they brought them back for a while.

MC: That's very interesting. I didn't realise that

So they have been gone for quite a while now. It's a nice image for me anyway, to imagine all the horse and carts down by the station. And they used to keep it very nice, didn't they? The station with flowers and so on. Do you remember any of that?

MC: Flowers? At the station? I don't remember that.

I was told the people, who used to look after it, the guards and things used to you know,

MC: You may well be right, but I don't remember any of it.

Do you remember any of the other shops?

MC: Oh yes, we got as far as the Express Dairy didn't we? Let me see, there was a shop called Wesalp, ever heard of that? It must have been, I don't know what it was, but he kept a stationers.

Why?

MC: A rather high-class stationers.

Whereabouts was that?

MC: You know as you go down, Montpelier Vale, you get to a fork on your right, Wesalp was just about opposite the fork I should think.

And was that really high quality stuff you get there?

MC: Oh yes, if you wanted your letter heading done, you could get it done at Wesalp I should think, but I think my father used to get it done at the Blackheath press.

Do you remember Waylands, the photographers?

MC: Oh, yes!

Because that is where we now are, we are in that shop.

MC: Oh yes, I had realised that but forgotten for a moment, yes I have been photographed at Waylands

Have you?

MC: Many a time as a child.

Do you remember those days when you had to dress up and go along there?

MC: Oh yes

Was that fun or was that difficult, or?

MC: I don't think I minded particularly.

Was it every year or just every now and then?

MC: Oh I don't know, not as far as I know. Just occasionally I think.

And who was there? Was there one man all the time doing the photographs or did it change?

MC: Oh, I don't think it ever changed. Not as far as I remember.

And did you belong to a local church or anything like that?

MC: Yes, we belonged to St. Michaels.

Where's that? Up in Kidbrooke, is it?

MC: No, St. Michaels, Blackheath Park, it's at the corner of Pond Road and Blackheath Park. Close to the crossroads. And if you went on, St. Michaels on your right, but if you went straightforward you went down what they called the Old Hall I think, or Hall Estate, something to do with Hall.